

Uncirculated dollars usually worth the price

By Roger Boye

Here are more answers to questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—I have \$500 to invest in U.S. silver dollars from the late 1800s. Should I buy 30 "common dates" tarnished from use [a dealer I know charges \$17 each for such coins] or a couple of rarities in uncirculated condition [another dealer is asking \$225 for just one 1885 dollar made in Carson City, Nev.]. Which deal would have the greater profit potential?

H.T., Highland, Ind.

A—During the past three decades, most uncirculated coins have greatly outperformed their worn cousins in the numismatic market. But be certain each shiny rarity you buy merits its condition ranking; even the slightest trace of wear can greatly lower a keepsake's market value.

Q—What's the difference between Federal Reserve notes and United States notes? We own three \$2 bills of series 1963, each a United States note with red serial numbers.

B.G., Aurora

A—Both types are legal tender in the United States for all debts, public and private. Federal Reserve banks issue the familiar Federal Reserve notes with green serial numbers, the only type of U.S. paper money currently produced. The Treasury Department issued the United States notes with red numbers; the last such bills entered circulation in 1971.

Q—I found an 1866 nickel while sifting some soil in this historic town. All the markings are quite legible, but someone drilled an extremely small hole in the coin. Has the nickel's value been drastically reduced?

M.T., New Harmony, Ind.

A—Yes, because most collectors shun holed coins. Your item probably would fetch just \$1 or so, while a "good condition" specimen without the deformity might sell for \$10.

Q—My father owns a two-cent coin dated 1865. How much is it worth, and why did Uncle Sam make such an odd-denomination coin?

C.Z., Chicago

A—Common-date two-cent pieces—including the 1865—retail for \$4 or so if in "good condition." Officials first issued the denomination in 1864 to help relieve a shortage of "hard money" during the Civil War. But the coin gradually fell into disuse and production was discontinued 10 years later.